

INTELLIGENCE ON ENEMY ORDER OF BATTLE AT THE TIME
OF THE TET OFFENSIVE

A Mr. Sam Adams has testified before the Pike Committee of the House of Representatives and alleged that key military and civilian officials conspired to mislead the public and the press by supressing "true" intelligence. Mr. Adams' view of true intelligence was his unique view of total fighting strength of the enemy on 1967-1968 in Vietnam.

I am Lieutenant General Daniel O. Graham, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. I have, during my career, spent over three years on the staff of the Director of Central Intelligence at CIA Headquarters. During the period of the Tet Offensive, I was the Chief of the Current Intelligence and Estimates Division, J-2, MACV. My tour in Vietnam was from mid-1967 through mid-1968. I had been in Vietnam on temporary duty for a short period of time in 1966. I am very familiar with the circumstances surrounding the allegations that Mr. Adams has made.

In the final analysis, the validity of Mr. Adams' attacks on the reputations of individuals in his own agency, in military intelligence and of other military and diplomatic leaders rests on the proposition that his figures were correct and everyone else's figures were "phony." The fact is that the opposite is true. Mr. Adams was quite wrong at the

time and is quite wrong now in insisting that there were 600,000 armed VC/NVA available to the enemy at the time of the Tet Offensive. History, rather than bearing out Mr. Adams' contentions, would prove to any reasonable man that he was wrong.

Adams contends that the "massiveness" of the Tet Offensive proves that MACV's and the total Intelligence Community figures for VC armed strength were grossly understated and that as a result, our forces were surprised at Tet; that 10,000 Americans were killed and 1,200 U.S. aircraft destroyed on the ground. The fact is that estimates of the total commitment of VC/NVA troops in the Tet Offensive range between 67,000 and 85,000 troops. Neither Mr. Adams nor anyone else has challenged these estimates. That is not to say that those figures are unchallengeable, but even if we grant the possibility that they are 100 per cent too low and that attacking VC/NVA troops bordered on 170,000, the Tet Offensive indicates that MACV, CIA, DIA figures were too low, not too high. There was ample evidence at the time of the Tet Offensive that the enemy was really scraping the bottom of the barrel to increase the strength of his attack. VC/NVA were captured who had obviously been taken directly from the hospital and drawn into the fight with serious unhealed wounds from previous battles. We also know that the VC/NVA forces at the last minute conscripted villagers, including teenage boys and girls,

to add to the weight of their attacks. Some of these were issued brand-new AK-47 assault rifles, which they not only did not know how to operate but which, when they were captured, were still wrapped in their preservative materials. This evidence is further reinforced by our knowledge that the replacements for losses in VC units had to come from North Vietnam and were not available in the south. Had the large pools of uncommitted armed strength suggested by Mr. Adams been available, this obviously would not have been necessary. We were not surprised by the fact of the Tet Offensive; we were not surprised by the "massiveness" of the numbers of troops committed. What surprised us was the rashness of the Tet attacks which included as objectives major population areas where the enemy could not expect, and did not achieve, military success. Thus, the evidence from the Tet Offensive does prove that all estimates were wrong by being too high in terms of total VC combat strength available and that the worst estimate around was Mr. Adams' 600,000.

With regard to Mr. Adams' allegations in HARPER'S magazine that 10,000 Americans were killed in the Tet Offensive and his allegation before this Committee that 1,200 aircraft were destroyed on the ground, it should be apparent that it is Mr. Adams, and not those whom he would accuse, who has an inclination to use phony figures to make a point. The facts are that during the Tet Offensive, a little over 2,200 Americans

lost their lives, and about 58 U.S. aircraft were destroyed, and about 280 received some damage on the ground. And they were certainly not wing tip to wing tip a la Pearl Harbor, as Adams alleges. While I do not contend that these were insignificant losses, I believe it necessary to stress that Mr. Adams' figures are gross distortions.

Mr. Adams has alleged that General Creighton Abrams, General Westmoreland, Ambassador Bunker, and key officials of his own agency conspired to suppress his figures in favor of what he claims are phony figures. This conspiracy, he alleges, was designed to deceive the American public. His chief exhibit is a message from General Abrams to his superiors in Washington, which has been released to this Committee. That message had previously been printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD by Representative McCloskey, who, I am morally certain, received this classified message from Mr. Adams. In my view, any attempt to place General Abrams at the head of some conspiracy to deceive in itself indicates a lack of rationality on the part of the accuser. Anyone even remotely familiar with the character of Creighton Abrams would pick another target for such an accusation. Further, if one reads the message in question, he will see that General Abrams is attempting to prevent phony figures, that is, Adams' figures, from being entered into Washington-level documents describing armed strength of the enemy; quite the opposite from defending phony figures!

Regarding the worries of General Abrams and others that the addition of Mr. Adams' figures to the order of battle would cause consternation in the United States because of probable press treatment, I would have to say that such worries were certainly justified. Let me tell you why I think so. Prior to the controversy caused by Mr. Adams' analysis, J-2, MACV, had raised its estimates of total enemy strength to about 275,000 from a figure which, as I recall, was closer to 200,000. This was done because MACV intelligence people had been preoccupied in the early years, 1965 through 1966, with getting a handle on the numbers and strengths of main force Communist units and had relied on the Vietnamese intelligence estimates of the number of guerrillas. This upward revision of figures caused a press reaction which ignored the fact that this was simply a correction of a neglected figure, and in some quarters, accused MACV of raising the figures in order to justify additional resources. The accuracy of General Abrams' predictions as to press reaction to acceptance of Mr. Adams' figures is borne out by an article appearing in the 20 March 1968 edition of THE NEW YORK POST, which quotes Mr. Adams' 600,000 figure and titles the article, "A Policy of Massive Miscalculation." The 600,000 figure was, according to the story, "suggested by the Central Intelligence Agency." Since I know of no position by the Central Intelligence Agency which coincided with Mr. Adams' 600,000 figure, I

presume that the source of this press leak was Mr. Adams himself. In any case, as General Abrams predicted, there is no indication in the story of the addition or previously uncounted elements of VC strength consisting largely of old people and teenagers without arms or training.

I have pointed out earlier that history, in fact, strongly indicates that Mr. Adams was wrong. Let me say a few words about the real reasons his numbers were rejected even before the historical evidence was in.

By his own admission, Adams was the only analyst at CIA Headquarters following VC strengths. There were at least thirty analysts in MACV Headquarters following this subject in far more detail. In addition, MACV had U.S./Vietnamese teams at the district and province levels throughout Vietnam specifically charged with providing estimates of guerrilla strength. Adams further admits that he based his analysis on VC documents alone. MACV analysts viewed these documents as well, but were unwilling to place the heavy reliance upon them that Adams did. Many of these VC documents were reports of VC recruiters--called proselyters in their own terminology--reporting their success in organizing for the Communists the population of the districts in which they worked. There was a strong tendency in all VC documents reporting to their superiors to overstate success. For instance, VC commanders would report numbers of U.S. and Allied personnel carriers

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destroyed in districts and provinces where we simply had no armored personnel carriers. Thus, to MACV analysts, VC documents were not an impeccable source of information on VC strength. They gave more credence to the counts of guerrilla strength from the districts of Vietnam which had been reported to them. It should be noted that MACV observers counted guerrillas simply as guerrillas and would be unable to distinguish between a simple guerrilla, a self-defense guerrilla, a secret self-defense guerrilla, or an assault youth guerrilla--categories which Adams wished to add to guerrilla strength. We in MACV had no illusions about precision of the counts of guerrillas reported in this fashion. In fact, we tended to consider them, if anything, too high. There was a natural inclination toward prudence in such counts from the field, since over-optimism regarding the guerrilla threat in one province or district could result in less attention to its security, and the men doing the reporting, both U.S. and Vietnamese, lived and worked there. Finally, we noted that the level of guerrilla activity in all of South Vietnam had dropped off sharply since about the beginning of 1966 and by mid-1967 was at such a low ebb that it was difficult to explain the low level of activity when viewed against our estimates of 70,000 to 90,000 guerrillas.

Mr. Adams' general approach was to take a VC document that suggested certain levels of strength in the VC apparatus in one district and multiply those numbers by numbers of districts. This, to MACV, seemed rather simpleminded and reflected a mechanical approach by a Washington-based analyst totally unfamiliar with the vast differences from district to district and province to province in Vietnam.

In sum, Mr. Adams' figures were not rejected because of a conspiracy; they were rejected because his analysis was bad in the view of most intelligence officers in Washington and in MACV. His views were rejected only after his agency gave him ample opportunity to present his thesis to other analysts. As events unfolded, Mr. Adams was, in my view, proved conclusively wrong. The biggest mistake that we made in MACV was to compromise with Mr. Adams and add 24,000 personnel to the VC/NVA order of battle on the basis of his arguments, thus making us 24,000 men more in error than we had been.

It may well be that the only adherents to Adams' views of 600,000 VC ready to fight were in the enemy high command. They obviously expected a massive uprising to accompany their Tet Offensive. Perhaps they too were taken in by VC documents inflating their strength.

In my view, Mr. Adams does a hard-pressed U.S. Intelligence Community an enormous disservice by accusing them of

outright mendacity. He is on a vendetta against anyone who would not accept his unique view of VC/NVA order of battle.

Thank you.

DCI/DDCI

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SUSPENSE

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Remarks:

Pls check NIO + DDI
for comments - We
might like to ask Danny
to testify or file this
for the record -

2

DCI/DDCI

11/24/75

STAT

FROM THE DESK OF

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Bill -
If Graham's
statement can
stand up - Adams
will be proven to
be a "liar."
Is it that simple?

STAT

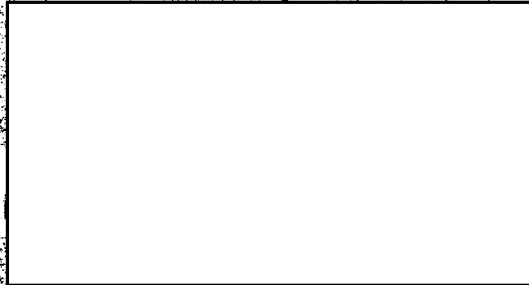


11/24/75

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Callahan

Bill -

Hand was passed out by
Denny at noon today to
The Press.



Date

FORM 101 USE PREVIOUS
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